

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Cynthia High

**Date Submitted:** 09/22/2019 02:21 PM

**Council File No:** 17-1115

**Comments for Public Posting:** I am apposed to the current version of The Tour Bus Ordinance.  
Please read attached letter.

September 22, 2019

Dear Transportation Committee, Los Angeles City Council:

**RE: Item # 17-1115 Tour Bus Ordinance**

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Transportation Committee. I am **Cynthia High, treasurer of the Los Angeles Tour Guide Assoc.** I am also a tour guide and tour company operator, the co-owner of California Tour Lines, a small family-owned company that has been providing tours in Los Angeles since 1992.

***I urge you to not pass The Tour Bus Ordinance, Item #17-1115, as written in the Sept 18, 2019 version.***

Please permit me to address two issues: the big issue of tourism and how Los Angeles is embracing its visitors; and safety in particular, as the tour bus ordinance attempts to focus on safety. I hope to show you how the present Tour Bus Ordinance falls short of meeting Los Angeles' tourism needs. In addition, it does not properly address safety issues.

**Big Picture of Tourism in Los Angeles**

Congratulations for having 50,000,000 visitors in 2018! And I also congratulate you for implementing the "I CARE" customer service training for LAX employees. It is a pleasure to work with several LAX employees now, and I may implement some of their training with the tour guides. (I was one of the people trained.)

We know that hotel employees are experts at customer service, as well. So, the city has made efforts to make sure the visitors are taken care of from the airport to the hotel. Yet Los Angeles drops the ball when tourists exit the hotel and go out to explore the city. Or a more positive spin would be that Los Angeles has yet to adequately address the quality of the tourist's experience when he or she leaves the hotel.

Los Angeles is a major world city that attracts millions of visitors. I take direct calls from tourists every day, and I can tell you that the three sites tourists want to see most are:

- The Hollywood Sign
- The Hollywood Walk of Fame
- celebrity homes

This makes sense.

If you visit Paris, you expect to see the Eifel Tower.

If you visit Sydney, you expect to see the Opera House,

If you visit New York City, you expect to see The Statue of Liberty.

Major world cities, in general, value tourism and make it easy for its visitors to visit the icons of the city. It's part of their overall tourism plan. Granted Los Angeles tourism needs are unique because two of the three major attractions in Los Angeles are located in neighborhoods. Yet when you come to Los Angeles, how do we embrace our tourists?

Let me use a metaphor. Picture a bouncer, arms crossed, saying to you,

"I dare you to try to see The Hollywood Sign!" Two weeks ago, I would have said the same of Hollywood Blvd. "I dare you to try to explore the stars on the sidewalk" But we are making tremendous progress on the Blvd. I want to congratulate Mitch OFarrell and Dan Halden for the immediate improvements to walkability of Hollywood Blvd. And I want to thank the council as a whole for paying for the enforcement. Already it's made a big difference.

The Hollywood Sign access is indeed problematic, and it must be addressed at some time soon. Right now, I only wish to address the issue of celebrity homes and the Tour Bus Ordinance.

Most cities, even medium-sized cities like St. Louis, offer city tours. In Los Angeles, a popular component of the tour experience is the celebrity homes. Celebrity homes have been a part of the culture and tradition in Los Angeles tourism since the 1930s when Starline started. It has an 84 year history.

While the city's efforts to improve the Hollywood Blvd experience are laudable and headed in the right direction, the tour bus ordinance is an anti-tourist measure, headed in the wrong direction. It would kill an 84 year old tourist tradition. It would disappoint many, many tourists. I urge you to consider the cultural history of the city. I urge you to consider the hopes of many of the 50 million visitors you are so proud to have brought here.

I acknowledge that the traffic for the homeowners is unpleasant. The bad behavior of unethical tour guides is indeed intolerable. We need to keep working on the issue to make it better for the homeowners, but this ordinance is not the answer. In its present form, the ordinance is so sweeping that it will hurt honest, ethical tour guides as well as badly behaving ones. The idiom "We're throwing the baby out with the bath water" comes to mind.

The Los Angeles Tour Guide Association is trying to do our part to contribute to improving guide quality. We are committed to promoting ethical behavior, and developing skilled and educated tour guides who know more parts of the city than just the celebrity homes. This could eventually expand the city tours

to other areas. It is our plan, over time, that guides will be more accurate, better trained, and frankly, more ethical about following laws and ordinances. This is a work in progress for us.

It is unwise to simply outlaw streets for all tour vans. In its present form, the ordinance is capricious, discriminatory, and much too broad in scope. To do better, we have to work together on these issues, and weigh all factors in the decisions. We must artfully, delicately and skillfully balance the needs of tourists with the needs of homeowners. And this ordinance does not do that. We can do better.

## **SAFETY**

The present Tour Bus Ordinance is focused on the safety of the roads. It is very important ***to separate the difference between the safety of the vehicle, and the safety of the road.***

### **Tour Vehicle Safety**

There are several existing ordinances and guidelines that regulate tour bus safety. A properly licensed tour bus or van, if operated by an ethical operator following the rules, has several safety measures. The driver must be an insured, commercially licensed driver, and he or she physically inspects the vehicle before every trip. This is required by law. We are subject to random drug testing. We also have a certified mechanic inspect our vehicles every 45 days, and the CHP inspects and certifies 2/3 of our fleet every year. We pay a small fortune for insurance, and we can only be insured by insurance companies approved by the State of California. These insurance companies frequently drop drivers if they have more than two citations. Newly licensed commercial drivers are usually not insurable. I remind you of this because I would argue that the current safety guidelines for tour vans are more stringent than Uber or Lyft drivers, other commercial vehicles such as Fed Ex delivery trucks, city vehicles such as garbage trucks, or passenger vehicles belonging to homeowners, their visitors, or commercial gardeners.

Even though the safety requirements for tour vans are stringent, there are safety issues the city should be concerned about. There are a plethora of unlicensed operators. In addition, even licensed operators do not always follow all of the guidelines they are supposed to. Both of these problems, though, are enforcement issues, and do not require a new ordinance. The ethical tour operators, and the tourists we serve, should not be punished for the rogue and unethical operators.

Another vehicle safety concern for some is the open top vans. The NHTSA expressed suspicion about the safety of open top vans three years ago, but it has yet to offer a finding or conclusion to their concerns. In the meantime, the CHP continues to certify them as safe, the California-approved insurance companies continue to insure them, and certified mechanics continue to pass them in 45 day inspections. If the city council is concerned with open top vehicle safety in particular, they might want to address their concerns to the PUC, the State insurance commissioner, the insurance companies,

the CHP, NHTSA or the California State legislature. It is inappropriate to ban all tour vehicles, small and large, open and closed, modified and unmodified as the present ordinance does. If open top vehicles are indeed your concern, the issue should be addressed honestly and directly. Find out -- are they safe, or not? What does the data show? In the meantime, they are certified in many ways by many organizations as safe.

### **Road Safety**

The current ordinance focuses on “road safety.” It will limit tour vans of all shapes and sizes from driving on streets that the city deems as unsafe for tour buses. It wants to eliminate the weight restriction. This is indeed problematic – if a road is unsafe for a mini-van tour van, how is it safe for the residents?

In other words, if it is the **road** that is unsafe, not the tour vehicle itself, how is the road unsafe for a tour van but safe for Uber, Lyft, garbage trucks, Fed Ex trucks, gardener trucks, and the residents themselves? We are responsible for many aspects of safety, but not the road itself. If a road such as Mulholland Drive has so much traffic, why is the city’s answer to close the road to tourists? Isn’t a better answer to improve the road?

The focus on road safety is a thinly veiled attempt to forbid tour buses on public streets because they are unwanted by homeowners. The ordinance isn’t really about safety. If it were, they would have at least tried to resolve the open top bus safety concerns that were brought up by the federal government. The city would be rigorous in its enforcement of rogue operators, unlicensed operators, and those who don’t follow the rules.

Most tour operators are legitimate, licensed operators assisting the 50 million visitors in the city, helping them enjoy and fall in love with Los Angeles. It is discriminatory to say tour buses cannot drive on public streets when other businesses are allowed to. It’s not logical to say that a road is unsafe for one business but safe for another. And it would put an end to an 84 year old tourist tradition without any replacement or alternative. In its present form, it is an anti-tourist, and anti-business ordinance.

I urge you to not approve the Tour Bus Ordinance, Item #17-1115. We can do better.

Sincerely,

Cynthia High, Treasurer

Los Angeles Tour Guide Association ([laguides.org](http://laguides.org))

[treasurer@laguides.org](mailto:treasurer@laguides.org)

And

California Tour Lines, Inc. ([californiatourlines.com](http://californiatourlines.com))

[info@californiatourlines.com](mailto:info@californiatourlines.com)

